

SOME UNUSUAL WINTER VISITORS OR LATE MIGRANTS TO THE BEAR RIVER MARSHES, UTAH ⁽¹⁾

CLARENCE COTTAM, CECIL S. WILLIAMS,
and
CLARENCE A. SOOTER

The marsh and water area near the mouth of the Bear River in northern Utah is one of the Nation's most important nesting and concentration points for marsh and water birds. No fewer than two million ducks concentrate here late in the summer and early in the fall, and probably as many marsh and shore birds find a favorable habitat during this period.

It is not surprising, therefore, that within such concentrations the bird student should occasionally find rare or accidental visitors or abnormal individuals that have failed to migrate or that have postponed migration until winter has begun. This refusal to migrate—or the unseasonably late migration of species that normally migrate in the fall—may be due to physical handicap or physiological abnormality; it may also be associated with unusual weather conditions. Most of October and much of November 1941 were not unusual, although periods of freezing temperatures occurred after Thanksgiving. December was surprisingly warm during the first 2 weeks, the weather becoming severe on the 19th. Much of the marsh and water area in northern Utah was frozen over periodically after mid-November, and it is strange that delayed migrants did not leave at that time.

An account of the more uncommon birds found near Great Salt Lake, mostly during the latter part of December, 1941, follows:

Aechmophorus occidentalis. Western Grebe. Three individuals were seen in the main canal near Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge headquarters on December 14, 1941, by Superintendent Vanez T. Wilson and members of the staff. Larger numbers had been seen on the Refuge before this date. On December 28—during a period of heavy snow, strong wind, and freezing temperature—Williams and Sooter observed two Western Grebes in a spillbox runway of Unit 5. Two more of the species were seen on the Refuge on December 27, and two were noted near Ogden on January 10, 1942.

Podilymbus p. podiceps. Pied-billed Grebe. This species commonly winters in small numbers at the Refuge; during the winter it may be found on open water throughout Salt Lake and Utah Valleys. No fewer than 50 individuals were seen on the Refuge on December 16, 1941, and 1 was seen on December 28

(1) Contribution from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

during a blizzard. Sooter and Williams observed 18 birds on January 5, 1942, in an unfrozen pot-hole of the Bear River.

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos. White Pelican. One bird flew into a telephone wire on November 15, 1941, and broke its wing. This bird was rescued later and placed in the "hospital" pond near Refuge headquarters. The bird seems to have recovered and is enduring the weather very well.

Ardea herodias treganzai. Great Blue Heron. Probably a limited number of Treganza's Herons winter each year on the Bear River Refuge. On December 16, 1941, the writers were much surprised, however, to find about 75 (a number far greater than that recorded for a December date in any preceding year) on the Refuge. Sixteen birds were recorded on December 27, two on December 28, 1941, and one on January 5, 1942.

Egretta thula brewsteri. Brewster's Egret. A few Snowy Egrets, presumably of this race, were found on the Refuge until the end of the first week of December 1941. They are common summer nesters in this section of the State.

Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli. Black-crowned Heron. A limited number of Black-crowned Night Herons normally winter on the Bear River Refuge. Young were noted in nests during a snowstorm on March 8, 1940, indicating that nesting began in February. Nests may be found early each spring. Eight birds were observed by the Refuge staff during the Christmas bird census, December 27, 1941.

Plegadis guarauna. White-faced Glossy Ibis. These are common summer visitors to the Refuge but usually migrate late in September or early in October. During the fall of 1941, fair numbers remained in October; 12 were seen near Refuge headquarters on December 7; and 4 birds remained on Unit 1 until December 26. They were an annoyance to some duck hunters; the birds circled excitedly over the hunters' blinds, giving their discordant alarm calls that tended to spoil the duck shooting.

Cygnus columbianus. Whistling Swan. The Bear River marsh area is the favored fall and winter home of thousands of Whistling Swans. Supt. Wilson estimated that there were about twelve thousand on the Refuge during the Christmas bird census on December 27, 1941.

Querquedula cyanoptera. Cinnamon Teal. Although Cinnamon Teals are common nesters in favorable habitat in northern Utah, the birds usually migrate early, very few remaining by the first of October. It may be of interest to report that on the last day of the open season (December 14, 1941) one Cinnamon Teal was shot on the shooting grounds of Bear River Marshes, and that during the 8-week open season (October 16 through December 14) 121 passed through the checking station. Cottam has seen this bird on Utah Lake about the middle of February (1926).

Glaucionetta islandica. Barrow's Golden-eye. A pair of Barrow's Golden-eyes were seen on Unit 2, in company with five American Golden-eyes. The former are listed here merely because they are infrequently recorded in Utah, although they are probably more common as winter visitors to the State than our records indicate. Dr. E. R. Quortrup reports seeing several birds on the Bear River Refuge during the 1939-40 and 1940-41 winters, and he adds that he has a male skin taken on the Refuge during the 1939 hunting season.

Clangula hyemalis. Old-squaw. This bird is of rare and erratic occurrence in Utah, although 13 specimens were taken on the Bear River Refuge during the 1934 hunting season. Occasionally, others have been seen just before the winter freeze. On December 10, 1941, Dr. Quortrup and Supt. Wilson observed an adult male on Unit 5.

Melanitta deglandi. White-winged Scoter. Because of the paucity of scoter records in Utah, it may be of interest to report that one bird was seen on Unit 5 of the Refuge on October 1, 1941, and two birds were taken on the shooting grounds during the open season.

Haliaeetus leucocephalus. Bald Eagle. The American emblem is an uncommon visitor to Utah during the summer but a conspicuous visitor to the Bear River Marshes during the coldest part of the winter. This fact strongly suggests that the Utah winter bird is of the northern race *H. l. alascanus*, although critical study of the specimens has not yet been made. On December 16, 1941, one Bald and one Golden Eagle were seen on the Refuge; three were seen on December

27; and two Bald Eagles were observed along the Bear River on January 5, 1942. During January and February, 6 to 10 birds may be found wintering there.

Capella delicata. Wilson's Snipe. Wilson's Snipe may be found sparingly during winter, even in northern Utah, provided the spring or stream seeps and borders do not become frozen over. On December 21 four birds were seen at a seep at Spring Run, south of Salt Lake City; on the preceding day a bird was flushed from an irrigation ditch at St. George. Cottam has taken this bird near Utah Lake during Christmas week. On December 28 Williams and Sooter observed eight individuals near Brigham City. On January 11, 1942, 28 birds were seen in almost the same area. Mr. Joseph Peterson states that two alighted on a small patch of gravel exposed in deep snow at the C.C.C. Camp in Brigham City on January 12, 1942.

Numenius a. americanus. Long-billed Curlew. Curlews remained at the Refuge unseasonably late in the fall of 1941. Dr. Quortrup and personnel from the Refuge staff observed 11 on November 21. The birds were seen in one flock near the Perry cabin, Unit 5, and were probably getting ready to migrate. They were not recorded after that date.

Totanus melanoleucus. Greater Yellow-legs. This species is one of the latest fall and earliest spring migrants. One bird lingered on the Refuge until December 10, when it was last recorded by Dr. Quortrup and Dr. Sudheimer.

Limnodromus griseus scolopaceus. Long-billed Dowitcher. A single bird was seen on Unit 3, December 12, 1941, by Dr. Quortrup and Dr. Sudheimer.

Limosa fedoa. Marbled Godwit. On December 16, 1941, the writers observed at close range two Marbled Godwits on Unit 3. One bird appeared somewhat lame in one leg, although powers of flight seemed normal. These or other individuals of the same species were seen repeatedly during November and December.

Recurvirostra americana. Avocet. Nine individuals—in three groups of one, two, and six—were observed on December 16, 1941. Four were recorded on the Refuge during the Christmas census made December 21, 1939. No previous winter records for Utah are known.

Larus argentatus smithsonianus. Herring Gull. Only in recent years has the Herring Gull been observed in Utah. A number of specimens have been collected during the past 3 years. One individual was observed on the Refuge in September, two were noted on December 16, two on December 27, and one on December 28, 1941.

Telmatodytes palustris plesius. Western Marsh Wren. The 1931 Check-List states that this bird "winters from California and central Texas (casually farther north) south to Cape San Lucas, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas." It should be reported that the bird is a common resident at the Bear River Marshes. Fairly large numbers can be seen daily. Ten individuals were seen in the tules between Unit 1 and Unit 2 on December 16, and four were observed in a tule marsh near Brigham City on December 28, 1941.

Myadestes townsendi. Townsend's Solitaire. This species is not uncommon in the mountains of Utah, although its presence in the almost treeless area of the Bear River Marshes is indeed rare. On November 19 an individual was seen to alight on a blind within 2 feet of a hunter. After a few moments the bird then rested on the back of a wooden duck decoy.

Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus. Yellow-headed Blackbird. This conspicuously colored bird normally winters from western Louisiana to Mexico. Its presence on the Bear River Refuge on December 16 is therefore worthy of record. Near it were Red-winged Blackbirds and two Brewer's Blackbirds, and not far distant were a small flock of Red-wings and at least two Cowbirds.